DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 032 CE 049 409

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TITLE A Study of the Career Development Characteristics of First-Year Community College Business Majors with Implications for Additional Research and a Suggested Advisement Model.
PUB DATE Dec 87
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention (Las Vegas, NV, December 6-10, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Education; *Career Counseling; *Career Development; *Community Colleges; Counseling Techniques; Models; Postsecondary Education; *Student Characteristics; Two Year Colleges; *Vocational Maturity

ABSTRACT

Efforts to retain students, including career development strategies, can be particularly costly when dealing with the diverse educational backgrounds and aspirations that are typically found among community college students. For this reason, a study examined the career maturity differences that exist among subgroups of freshman-level community college students majoring in business. Although some of the study findings supported previous research, others appeared to contradict the existing career maturity and career development research. This study did not sustain Crites' theory that career development skills increase with age and grade. The previous research concluding that females display significantly higher career maturity levels than males was confirmed. The present study did not support previous research suggesting correlations between career maturity and measures of intelligence and school achievement; rather, the study suggested that career maturity and school achievement are separate constructs. No significant relationships were found between career maturity and parental educational level or program orientation. The findings pointed to a need for further research in such areas as the effect of systematic career development programs, the underlying sociological and psychological factors that contribute to the greater career maturity and certainty among females, and the retention rates of students with initially low career maturity scores compared with students with initially high scores. A four-step career counseling model was proposed. It calls for identification of a corps of academic advisers within each department or divisional area, identification of incoming freshmen who are in special need of career planning assistance, preliminary conferences to verify initial screening test results, and referrals to a career center. (MN)

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A STUDY OF THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF FIRST-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE BUSINESS MAJORS WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH AND A SUGGESTED ADVISEMENT MODEL

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Indiana University, 1986

AVA Convention
Las Vegas, Nevada
1987

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OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

OBJECTIVE

Although the issue of student attrition is complex, a relatively large body of literature supports the view that a student's persistence in college is at least partially related to career development factors. Research indicates that among the more frequent reasons students tend to drop out of school are lack of early detection of special needs and uncertainty about choice of major and career goals. Moreover, other studies (e.g. Goodson, 1969) have found that career attitudes of freshman college students can actually become less mature as a function of being in an unfamiliar and potentially threatening environment. Wattenbarger (1985-86) states that career information is a basic essential along with career counseling for individual potentials and needs, and that community colleges need to give specific emphasis to career development strategies. Further, according to Borow (1982) far more baseline data must be gathered if trustworthy norms of special populations and age-and-sex related career development behaviors are to be established.

This suggests that timely and appropriate career development interventions may have a positive influence on decisions to remain in school. Therefore, information concerning career development characteristics of specific subgroups of students within a discipline may be useful in designing more effective freshman orientation and advisement programs. The purpose of this study was to examine the career maturity characteristics of freshman-level Business majors at a comprehensive community college. Specifically, this research measured the career maturity within the population subgroups based on gender and program orientation (transfer or occupational). In addition, relationships between career maturity and selected student factors such as age, parent's education, sex, career certainty, SAT scores and program orientation

were examined. Finally, Crite's (1978) monotonic theory of career development was tested for this population.

PERSPECTIVE

Student retention has been a concern of college administrators for a number of years. High rates of attrition represent not only a financial loss to the institution, but a loss to society in general (Pascal & Kanowich, 1979). However, retention efforts, including career development strategies, can be costly--particulary for community colleges where there is a commitment to meeting the needs of students with highly diverse educational backgrounds and wide ranges of career interests, aspirations and motivations. Therefore, providing both effective and efficient career development assistance depends in part on the amount of relevant information advisors have about their students. While there is considerable information available about the career development traits of college students in general, career maturity differences that exist among subgroups of freshman-level community college students within a particular discipline such as Business are less well known.

FINDINGS

This study addressed the issue of career maturity differences based on program orientation and gender, variables influencing career maturity, and the monotonic aspect of career development. Its findings both support and contradict some of the earlier studies on career development of college students. The major findings were as follows:

1. The data generated by this study did not appear to sustain the monotonic theory of career development. The overall career maturity level displayed by this population of first-year community college Business students, as measured by the CMI Attitude Scale, was slightly less than the Grade 12 and considerably less than the Grade 13 norms established for the CMI Attitude Scale. Thus, the results of this study did not sustain Crites' theory that career development skills increase with age and grade.

2. The findings of the study regarding career maturity of females tended to support the results of some of the earlier research which showed that females displayed significantly higher career maturity levels than males. In the present study, females in general (combined transfer and occupational) demonstrated a higher level of career maturity than their male counterparts. Also, when the sample was classified according to program orientation and gender, again females in both program orientation categories displayed higher career maturity levels than their male peers.

3. A finding which proved somewhat surprising was the apparent lack of any significant difference in career maturity levels between subgroups based on program orientation. That is, the findings indicated no significant difference in career maturity, as measured by the CMI Attitude Scale, between transfer and occupational subjects. Earlier studies underscored the career maturity differences between transfer-oriented students and those enrolled within occupational/vocational program. These previous studies found that the "academic" or transfer oriented students were more career mature than the vocationally oriented students. That was not the case in the present study. The results of this study indicated that transfer and occupational subjects within the population were virtually equal in terms of career maturity levels.

4. Previous research which reported significant correlations between career maturity and measures of intelligence and school achievement was not supported by the findings in the present study. On the other hand, the findings tended to support the theory that career maturity and school achievement (as reflected by SAT scores) are separate constructs.

5. The findings showed no significant relationship between age and scores on the CMI Attitude Scale--a result that again was surprising in light of the findings of earlier studies by Crites and other researchers who had demonstrated the monotonic characteristics of career development.

6. The findings revealed no significant relationship between parents' level of education and career maturity.

7. Significant relationships found in this study between career maturity and certainty of educational/career goals tended to support many of the previous studies, which demonstrated strong relationships between these two variables.

8. The findings demonstrated a strong relationship between gender and career maturity which tended to support the earlier studies which indicated that females generally

have significantly higher career maturity scores than males on the Career Maturity Inventory.

9. The findings showed no significant relationship between career maturity and program orientation.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of the study have implications for both additional research and pragmatic applications.

Research Implications

A. Given the fact that the findings within this study contradicted a number of the well established conclusions found in earlier research concerning the relationship of career maturity to such variables as age and program orientation (transfer vs. occupational), it appears reasonable to suggest that additional research be carried out to validate the results of the present study. In short, do the results of this study represent a fluke, or would these results essentially be repeated within similar populations?

B. The findings of the present study also suggest the need for pilot projects involving comparisons of "treated" and "untreated" groups within similar populations. Specifically, student groups might be tracked to determine retention rates of students exposed to a systematic career development program versus those not exposed to special career development strategies.

C. Additional research might focus on the underlying sociological and psychological factors which contribute to the apparently greater stability among females concerning career certainty. Research in this area might also attempt to

analyze what impact, if any, the relatively recent expanding career choices available to women has had on the career development of females in general.

D. A study might be conducted comparing the retention rates of students in the original study who had low career maturity scores (e.g. lower than established norms for the CMI Attitude Scale) with students whose career maturity scores were higher than the norms.

Pragmatic Implications

Since retention is one of the most critical issues facing college administrators currently, an action-oriented course of action seems warranted in light of the findings of the study. Given what the present study has revealed, it appears reasonable to recommend a career development model designed specifically to address the career planning needs of freshman-level community college students. In most institutions, the ideal facilitator for this type of personal assistance would appear to be the faculty advisor. Although the typical advisor may not possess all the skills necessary to act as a "career counselor", the advisor often is in a unique position through frequent contacts with students and knowledge of career requirements to provide valuable guidance to students in areas of career decision making. Thomas Grites (1979) has written:

> "The academic advisor is the natural resource to make use of both the affective and cognitive determination.... As advisors find out more about student involvement, commitment, and course selections, they will, in turn, become significant adults; as they become apprised of and gather certain information about their students, they will be better able to provide the kind of assistance needed to improve retention. The academic

advisor is an integral component of admission and retention programs, and such a resource should not be left unused, since those who are not working for retention are, in fact, working against it." (pp 25-29)

A SUGGESTED MODEL

Since it seems reasonable to engage the academic advisor more actively in helping students in developing career plans, then those efforts must be both well-thought out and consistent with the individual needs of students. Any model utilizing academic advisors as facilitators of special career development programs should include at least the following elements:

1. Identification and/or development (including appropriate pre-service training) of a corps of academic advisors within each department and/or divisional area. It is probably fallacious to assign the advising task to everyone and anyone who teaches in an academic specialty because academic expertise is not the sole prerequisite to good advising. If advisors are to function well, they probably should be trained in interpersonal and basic counseling skills. At the least, the following criteria should be employed in the selection of this corp of advisors:
    a. previous success advising experience.
    b. knowledge of available resources/ services within the institution.
    c. knowledge and willingness to employ resources external to the institution.

d. broad knowledge of occupational and and academic fields.

e. a strong interest in acting as a "mentor" in assisting students with career planning needs.

2. Identification of incoming freshman students needing career planning assistance through the administration of such instruments as the Career Maturity Inventory Attitude Scale, etc. during the freshman orientation program. (e.g. students scoring below 12th grade norms on CMI Attitude Scale might be targeted for special career planning assistance)

3. Students targeted for special career assistance are assigned to the selected advisors within their major areas.

4. Specific career development strategies might include, but would not be limited to, the following strategies:

    a. preliminary conferences to verify initial test results and to outline an individualized career development plan.

    b. referrals to Career Center (where available) for additional assessment and exploratory experiences including such programs as:

        1. System of Interactive Guidance and Information (SIGI)

        2. TEDS (Training Educational Data Service)

3. DISCOVER (A computerized self-assessment program).

c. enrollment in Career Planning courses if available.

d. interviews with community persons representing various career fields.

e. on a referral basis, meetings between students and faculty representing other academic discipline.

f. structured group meetings conducted by faculty to present information regarding their discipline.

g. special reading assignments concerning career fields.

h. establishing a "Speaker's Bureau" with an adequate budget to bring regional and state-level business leaders to campus to discuss their own career choices and the factors that influenced their successes.

i. "Career Days" at various intervals throughout the academic years.

j. additional follow-up conferences with advisors to review results of previous testing and exploratory experiences.

CONCLUSION

There appears to be sufficient evidence to support the view that career development factors significantly influence retention rates among college students. Community colleges, in particular, which serve highly diverse student

populations might effectively address the issue of student attrition by an early identification of the career development needs of students, and the implementation of a system of career development strategies. A suggested model might incorporate an "advisement center" concept involving special faculty advisors who would carry out an intrusive and developmental form of advising using a system of career development strategies.

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